

## Boucher and Warner Reintroduce Legislation To Protect Natural Beauty Of Southwest Virginia (April 28, 2005)

Legislation Would Designate New Wilderness and National Scenic Areas, Promote Tourism

(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Representative Rick Boucher and U.S. Senator John Warner today joined together to introduce in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005. If enacted, the legislation would create seven new Wilderness Areas, two new National Scenic Areas and would expand six existing Wilderness Areas in portions of Bland, Craig, Grayson, Giles, Lee, Montgomery and Smyth Counties within the Jefferson National Forest.

"Southwest Virginia possesses the state's best outdoor experience, with the highest mountains, most interesting rivers and superb hunting, camping, fishing, hiking and backpacking opportunities. If enacted, the legislation which Senator Warner and I are introducing today would not only designate nearly 55,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest as Wilderness or National Scenic Areas, thereby protecting their pristine quality, but also would enhance the tourism economy of the region by enticing travelers to visit and enjoy the protected and untouched landscape which Southwest Virginia has to offer. I am pleased to join with Senator Warner in introducing this legislation, and I will be working with my colleagues in both the House and the Senate to ensure its passage," Boucher said.

"As a father and grandfather, I feel an obligation to ensure that our children have lasting opportunities to enjoy and explore Virginia's immense natural beauty. This bill will preserve some of our most pristine lands for future generations and add significantly to the natural attractions of Southwest Virginia," Warner stated.

Designating a tract of land as Wilderness enables the U.S. Forest Service to preserve the scenic and undisturbed character of the landscape. Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, camping, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, picnicking, backpacking, bird watching, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, spelunking, rock-climbing and many other outdoor activities would be continued and encouraged in the new Wilderness Areas. At the same time, motorized traffic and mechanized equipment would be banned to prevent any disruption to the ecosystems and diverse wildlife in the areas.

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act would create seven new Wilderness Areas within the Jefferson National Forest. The legislation would also create two new National Scenic Areas. The National Scenic Area designations in Southwest Virginia would protect the recreational, historic and natural resources in the delineated areas. Mountain biking would be permitted in the National Scenic Areas, and limited motorized access would be permitted in certain portions of the Scenic Areas.

Each of the proposed Wilderness and National Scenic Area designations has been endorsed by either the U.S. Forest Service or the Board of Supervisors of the County in which the area would be located. The proposed new Wilderness Areas are:

**Stone Mountain (Cave Springs)** - The Stone Mountain proposed Wilderness Area is a 3,270-acre tract of land adjacent to the North Fork of the Powell River in Lee County. The property is considered to be the least disturbed forest in all of Southwest Virginia and is home to populations of two rare salamanders. The Stone Mountain and Payne Branch trails are included as part of the proposed Wilderness Area and provide convenient access for hikers and hunters wishing to visit the Wilderness Area. The trails are also connected to an adjacent campground at Cave Springs.

**Raccoon Branch** - The Raccoon Branch proposed Wilderness Area is located in Smyth County in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The property contains 4,223 acres of extremely rugged country characterized by high ridges and low streams. Eight major trails provide excellent access for hunters, fishermen, hikers and horseback riders and two nearby campgrounds serve as convenient trailheads. In addition, 4.5 miles of the Appalachian Trail also traverses the proposed Wilderness Area.

**Garden Mountain** - The Garden Mountain proposed Wilderness Area contains 3,291 acres of land which lies on the southern flank of Garden Mountain in Bland County. The area borders the unique geological structure of Burkes Garden and possesses two developed trails, totaling 8 miles when combined. Along the northern boundary, the Appalachian Trail leads across the summit of Garden Mountain, while the Lick Creek Trail provides access to the area along the valley bottom.

**Hunting Camp Creek** - The Hunting Camp Creek proposed Wilderness Area encompasses the headwaters of both Hunting Camp Creek and Little Wolf Creek in Bland County and is characterized by its exceptionally pristine nature. The area consists of 8,470 acres that stretch from ridge top to ridge top. The Appalachian Trail traverses the area as well as two informal trails along an old logging railroad grade next to Hunting Camp Creek and along the crest of Brushy Mountain. Brushy Mountain forms the Southeast boundary of the proposed wilderness, and Garden Mountain forms the northwestern edge. Virginia Routes 623, 615 and 610 complete the area's boundary.

**Lynn Camp Creek** - The Lynn Camp Creek proposed Wilderness Area is also located in Bland County and is 3,226 acres in size. The area is characterized by three parallel ridges which enclose the major stream valleys of Lick Creek and Lynn Camp Creek and provide the opportunity for good views. From the top of Lynn Camp Mountain, hikers can view Chestnut Ridge and the Beartown Wilderness. From Brushy Mountain, hikers overlook the valley of Lynn Camp Creek on one side and Big Walker Mountain on the other side. In addition, both Lick Creek and Lynn Camp Creek are excellent brook trout waters.

**Brush Mountain** - The Brush Mountain proposed Wilderness Area is located in Montgomery County, adjacent to the Town of Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. The area is 4,794 acres in size and extends approximately 8 miles along the northwest slope of Brush Mountain. The property is characterized largely by its remoteness, despite its proximity to the suburbs of Blacksburg, providing hunters and hikers with a feeling of true wilderness solitude.

**Brush Mountain East** - The Brush Mountain East proposed Wilderness Area is adjacent to the Brush Mountain proposed Wilderness Area and is located in Craig County. This tract is 3,769 acres in size and shares many of the characteristics of its neighboring proposed Wilderness Area. Brush Mountain East also possesses excellent views along Craig Creek

and Brush Mountain's steep mountain face.

The proposed National Scenic Areas designated in the legislation are:

**Bear Creek** - The Bear Creek proposed National Scenic Area is located in Smyth County and includes 5,503 acres. The area extends from the crest of Walker Mountain southward to the crest of Brushy Mountain and includes the enclosed valley of Bear Creek between the two mountains. An extensive network of trails is included in the proposed area, including more than four miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

**Seng Mountain** - The Seng Mountain proposed National Scenic Area is 6,455 acres in size and is located in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in Smyth County. Rowland Creek Falls, a 45-foot cascading waterfall is a major scenic attraction in the area. The area also includes a network of recreational trails and convenient access is provided to visitors via the Hurricane Campground and Skulls Gap Picnic Area.

In addition, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act will expand six existing Wilderness Areas to protect the unique and undisturbed landscape of the region. The Lewis Fork Wilderness Area in Smyth and Grayson Counties will be expanded an additional 308 acres; the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area in Grayson County will be expanded by 1,845 acres; the Kimberling Creek Wilderness Area in Bland County will be expanded by 612 acres; the Peters Mountain Wilderness Area which is located in Giles County will be expanded to include an additional 1,203 acres of Wilderness; the Mountain Lake Wilderness Area in Giles and Craig Counties will be expanded to include an additional 5,476 acres and the Shawvers Run Wilderness Area which is located in Craig County will be expanded to include an additional 2,456 acres of Wilderness.

U.S. Representatives Bobby Scott (VA-03), Jim Moran (VA-08), Frank Wolf (VA-10) and Tom Davis (VA-11) are original co-sponsors of the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.